

Japanese Knotweed

Polygonum cuspidatum

Control and General Information

This aggressive competitor in the Buckwheat Family was recently introduced from Asia as an ornamental and is still sometimes used in gardens.



Description: Japanese knotweed is a large, robust perennial that spreads by long creeping rhizomes to form dense thickets. The stems are stout, cane-like, reddish-brown, 4 to 9 feet tall. The plants die back at the end of the growing season. The stem nodes are swollen and surrounded by thin papery sheaths. The leaves are short-petioled, 2 to 6 inches long and about two-thirds as wide, egg-shaped and narrowed to a point at the tip. The flowers are small, creamy white to greenish white and grow in showy plume-like, branched clusters from leaf axils near the ends of the stems. The fruit is 3-sided, black and shiny.

Japanese knotweed grows quickly and aggressively. Large dense thickets form rapidly and shade out other plants. It can tolerate partial shade and is most competitive in moist, rich soil. Japanese knotweed is commonly found along roadsides and on stream banks. The thickets can completely clog small waterways and displace all other streamside vegetation. By displacing woody and soil-binding streamside vegetation, knotweed can increase bank erosion and lower the quality of riparian habitat for fish and wildlife.

Manual Control: Small infestations should be dug up and removed from the site. The plants can re-sprout from creeping rhizomes so care should be taken to completely dig up rhizomes. Cutting several times during the growing season will keep the plants from flowering and will weaken the roots and rhizomes. Cut stems and rhizomes should be removed from the site and discarded in a landfill. **Do not compost cuttings!** New sprouts from roots and rhizomes grow rapidly to replace removed plants. The cleared area should be inspected frequently for new growth and all new sprouts should be dug up. In order to reduce the growth of new sprouts, re-vegetate the area of infestation with quick-growing woody plants or perennials and use mulch over the disturbed soil.

Another manual option is to try sheet mulching, here is a web link with instructions on that process. This is a method of smothering weeds with organic materials. It is time consuming to set up, but leaves you with good soil and less weeds. <http://www.wildwords.com/Bombus/page22.html>

Chemical Control:

There are also herbicides that are effective especially when combined with follow-up manual control and monitoring for missed areas. For fall or spring control, use a product with glyphosate, such as Roundup, assuming that it doesn't rain too much. **Roundup is taken in only by leaves so it is not effective on woody stems or on leaves that are dying back.** In fall, make sure to treat the plant before it begins to die back. If plants have been cut, or are already dying out, wait until they have grown back for treatment. In the spring apply the herbicide after new leaves have appeared. Apply the herbicide evenly to all the green leaf surfaces so that they are thoroughly wet but not dripping. Roundup will injure any plants that it contacts so make sure not to drip herbicide onto any desirable plants including grasses and shrubs. Rain will reduce the effectiveness of the herbicide so you will need a dry day or at least 6 hours without rain. Roundup has the advantage of not damaging future plantings or even nearby plants as long as their leaves are not sprayed. It will not move in the soil and it doesn't get absorbed through roots or woody trunks, only green tissue.

If spraying is done in summer, products with the active ingredient Triclopyr will work. Brand name examples are Crossbow, Brush B Gone, and Blackberry Brush Killer. Triclopyr will not injure most grasses so it is a good choice in lawn areas. It is best to spray actively growing plants and make sure to get an even coverage over the whole plant, including stems and root crowns, so that it is wet but not dripping. Triclopyr is taken up by leaves, stems, woody tissue and roots. **Be careful not to let herbicide drift onto nearby plants and do not let it get on trunks of trees or other stems since Triclopyr is absorbed by woody tissue as well as green tissue.** Triclopyr does not stay in the soil very long so you will be able to replant the area. Look on the label for specific instructions. ***As with any herbicide, please follow the directions on the label carefully.***

Chances are that with either chemical method you may have to do more than one treatment over the course of several seasons or a few years. With manual control, you will be cutting back the plant for at least three years, though proper mulching and new plantings should help inhibit knotweed growth.

Please feel free to contact us if you have additional questions.



King County

Department of Natural Resources and Parks
Water and Land Resources Division

Noxious Weed Control Program

201 South Jackson Street, Suite 600
Seattle, WA 98104
206-296-0290 TTY Relay: 711
email: noxious.weeds@metrokc.gov
<http://dnr.metrokc.gov/weeds/>